Garden to Table: Relishing Stems

Leika Suzamura, Community Kitchens Northwest Program Manager

I must admit that, on occasion, I compost vegetable stems due to a lack of creativity and an aversion to mixing the tough texture of stems with the delicate leafy goodness of hearty greens.

I decided to find a way to actually enjoy cooking with edible stems after reading that stems are generally more alkalizing to our bodies – as opposed to the more acid forming nature of the standard American diet high in sugar, fat and meat. I am happy to say that this recipe is a success. I consistently get compliments and inquiries on how to make it. Who knew that compost bound scraps could be so good!

Community Kitchens Northwest advocates the idea of “intuitive cooking,” meaning we are able to make food taste delicious by focusing on flavor combinations, without necessarily following a recipe. Our approach combines the intuitive style with a rough outline to give the more structured cook a starting point. I encourage you to experiment and try a variety of different ingredients, using the five flavors, sweet, salty, sour, bitter and pungent as the base to create combinations that are sure to please.

Stem Relish

Ingredients
Sweet: ½ cup dried or fresh fruit, try fresh cherries, granny smith apples or raisins
Salty: 1 teaspoon salt
Sour: 2 Tablespoons vinegar, lime or lemon juice
Bitter: 2 cups stems (beets, collards, chard, kale or cilantro), diced small
1 cup leafy greens (optional), sliced thin
Pungent: ¼ cup red onion, diced

Directions
Mix all the ingredients in a bowl and let marinate for 15 minutes. Adjust flavors as needed. Pack relish in a mason jar. Relish will keep in the fridge for two weeks.